Liquidation

Silent, like in a graveyard,
Stand the little houses, sunken in sorrow.
No trace of that life has here remained,
Every wall is now black and grey.

As I walk down streets empty and bleak,
The echo of my own footsteps [is all that] I hear.
I gaze about: I [can] still perceive the traces
Of the spilt innocent blood.

I open the door of a tiny little house,
The sign of poverty is in every corner.
An old cupboard stands open wide;
On a bookshelf, I see a torn prayer-shawl.

A Chymesz, a Machzor, a Sidder, a Tchine.¹
Who has need of these sacred books now?
All those who once lived here,
To dark graves were driven away.

The Study-hall, bare and deserted,
With smashed windows stands.
Silenced forever is the song of the Talmud,
Which faraway could already be heard.

¹ [TN: Sacred Jewish books; one of the five books of the Pentateuch, a prayer-book for the High Holidays, an everyday prayer-book, and a prayer printed on a page, respectively. We have retained the original Hebrew words as they were pronounced in Poland in our rendition of the poem for the sake of conciseness.]
Also the Great Synagogue, the beautiful,
   Has like a ruin been left standing.
   Its congregants, large and small,
   Have all together been driven away.

   Shrouded in the darkness of night,
   The shtetl lies in deep sorrow.
   In the morning another day comes,
   A day without sun, a grey [kind of] day.

Only yesterday were [they] deported from here,
   Under a hail of bullets and fire.
   Ash and smoke has remained of them –
   Of the human life which is sacred and dear.

Driven away like dogs by the Nazi murderers,
   On their last road of suffering and pain.
   The road became wet from the tears,
   The air echoed with weeping.

   May that day be turned into
   An everlasting night.
   May the sun never shine there again,
   For the black power of Satan!

Jakow Fiszer